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ABSTRACT

Efforts to explain the harassment of women in the work place have focused on sex role socialization and cultural norms conditioning men to be dominant and initiators of sexual interactions. New work relationships, however, may bring new value to intimacy which may be differentiated from dominance gestures. To test the relationship of intimacy and dominance gestures reported by women in the corporate work place, 375 female workers were surveyed. The sample of 200 respondents was divided by age and marital status into four subgroups of comparable size: under 30 years of age, single; over 30 years of age, single; under 30, married; over 30, married. The subjects completed measures of intimacy and dominance gestures and sex-role liberation, and provided demographic information on age, marital status, education level, religious affiliation, and length of service with the company. Analysis of results showed a low positive correlation between the reported instances of the two types of gestures explaining only 11 percent of the variance. This finding suggests the relative independence of the occurrence of intimacy and dominance gestures. On the average, about three times more dominance than intimacy gestures were reported. Age, marital status, length of employment, religious affiliation, and sex role liberation were not related to experiences of intimacy and dominance. There was, however, a weak positive correlation between education and reports of intimacy gestures, probably due to more educated women's heightened awareness. The results support the contention that intimacy and dominance are separate dimensions. (MCF)

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Intimacy and Dominance Gestures in the Work Place

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Abstract

A survey with 200 women employees tested the relationship of reported sexual intimacy and dominance gestures by women in the corporate work place. The effect of age, marital status, length of employment, sex-role liberation and religious affiliation were also examined. There was a low positive correlation between the reported instances of the two types of gestures (r = .33, $p < .05$) explaining only 11 percent of the variance, which suggests the relative independence of the occurrences of intimacy and dominance gestures. However, dominance was reported more frequently ($\bar{X}$ = 9.56, SD = 2.20) than sexual intimacy ($\bar{X}$ =3.63, SD = 2.67). None of the variables were related to the occurrences of the two gestures. The viewing of harassment of women as masculine domination was questioned as an adequate explanation, with recognition of the need to take into account social-perceptual processes.

Intimacy and Dominance Gestures in the Workplace

The initiation of various forms of intimacy by men towards women is considered to be a reflection of domination of women (Hennig and Jardin, 1977). Henley (1977) has argued that initiation of intimacy is a characteristic of dominance which is open to higher status persons which can be used as a subtle means of putting another person in a subordinate role. The domination of women by men in the work setting is seen as an aspect of higher status of men in society at large. The work setting is one domain of social life where the relationship of men and women has significant personal, social and professional implications, and in fundamental ways examplifies the long enduring dominant-submissive pattern of relationships between the genders.

There is a wide range of verbal and nonverbal cues that function as gestures of dominance and submission in and out of the work setting between high and low status individuals, in general, and between men and women in particular (Thorne and Henley, 1975). These include men initiating conversation and talking more often than women (Aries, 1982); men using more familiar forms of address towards women (Slobin, Miller and Porter, 1968); men initiating joking more often than women (Traylor, 1973); men invading the personal space of women more often than women invading the personal space of men (Bailey, Harnett, and Gibson, 1972); men being more apt to look and engage in open staring than women (Exline, 1963); and men initiating physical contact more often with women than the other way around

(Patterson & Sechrest, 1970). These dominance gestures manifest themselves between the genders inasmuch as they do between high and low status individuals.

While considerable effort has been put into the study of status variables and dominance gestures, there are certain connected issues that need further exploration. At the theoretical level it is not clear whether dominance through sexually oriented intimacy such as touching and invasion of personal space, lies on a separate dimension from other forms of dominance gestures such as familiar forms of address and initiation of joking. While Argyle (1967), and Der-Karabetian and Rico (1983) argue that intimacy and dominance are separate dimensions, Radecki and Jennings (1980) and Henley (1977) indicate that sexually oriented intimacy is expressible along the same continuum as other dominance gestures.

Independent of the theoretical issues, intimacy and dominance gestures are closely connected to issues of harassment in the work place (Russell, 1984). It is only recently that sexual harrassment in the work place has been recognized as a serious social problem (Martin, 1984; Fox and Hesse-Biber, 1983). The federal courts and the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission consider sexual harassment as an illegal form of sex discrimination. Various efforts have been made to define harassment (Safran, 1976; Farley, 1978) and the one proposed by MacKinnon (1979) appears to be the most commonly accepted one which distinguishes between two types of harassment: one includes an explicit exchange of sexual favor for employment and educational

benefits; and the other occurs as a condition of work and includes a variety of behaviors such as touching, teasing, gazing, verbal innuendos, suggestive comments about appearance or sexual jokes that make the women's work environment unpleasant.

Although there is consensus that harassment is widespread in the work place (U. S. Merit Systems Protection Board, 1981; Brewer & Berk, 1982; Neugarten & Shafritz, 1980), the data is not clear on the relationship between experiences of intimacy and various demographic factors (Radecki & Jennings, 1980; Der-Karabetian & Rico, 1983).

Efforts to explain harassment of women in the work place has focused primarily on the traditional sex-role socialization and cultural norms that condition men to be strong, dominant, aggressive and initiators of sexual interaction (Martin, 1984; Tangri, Burt & Johnson, 1982). The power that these norms give men as a group to dominate women is carried into the work place and is manifested in various intimate and dominant behavioral gestures. While in the traditional perspective intimacy gestures may be viewed as extensions of dominance behaviors, it is conceivable that with the emergence of new types of relationships such as cross-sex colleagueship and friendships, a new value is being placed on intimacy (Safilios-Rothschild, 1981) which may be differentiated from dominance gestures. It should be recognized, however, that attribution of sexuality or dominance to a particular gesture is

often ambiguous (Cohen & Gutek, In press) and involves overlap of sex-roles and work-roles (Gutek & Morasch, 1982).

The purpose of the present study is to (a) re-examine the dimensionality of the intimacy and dominance gestures, (b) look at the relationship between age, marital status, religious affiliation, education, length of employment, sex-role liberation, and intimacy and dominance gestures, and (c) explore the harassment implication of such gestures.

Method

Subjects

Altogether 375 female workers were randomly selected from several departments of a major utility corporation in Southern California where male co-workers would most likely be found. There was a response rate of 53 percent. The sample of 200 respondents was divided into four subgroups of comparable size by age and marital status: (a) under 30 yrs., single (n = 56), (b) under 30 yrs., married (n = 39), (c) over 30 yrs., single (n = 48), and over 30 yrs., married (n = 57).

Questionnaire

Intimacy and dominance was measured by using Radecki and Jennings (1980) questionnaire which includes 14 sexual intimacy and 14 dominance gestures. For example, "Do co-workers place their arms around you?"; "Have you been sexually propositioned by a co-worker?". Sex-role liberation was measured by the 20-item FEM scale developed by Smith, Ferree and Miller (1975). Examples of items are "Women

have the right to compete with men in every sphere of activity." and "A women should be expected to change her name when she marries." On both of these scales, subjects were asked to indicate whether the statement was true for them with dichotomous yes/no choices. Scores on the scales were determined by the number of items endorsed. The questionnaire also included demographic items to identify age, marital status, educational level, religious affiliation and length of service with the company.

Procedure

After clearance was obtained for the administration of the questionnaire, company mail was used to distribute them to the randomly selected female subjects. The instructions indicated that the survey "explored issues of interpersonal communication in a work setting, and issues related to women." The anonymous and voluntary nature of the survey was stressed, and completed questionnaires were returned by company mail. On the intimacy and dominance scales, only gestures of male co-workers and not superiors were considered, to control for the work related status factor.

Results and Discussion

The number of endorsements on the dominance and sexual intimacy subsets of items was tabulated for each subject and the scores correlated. A Pearson correlation of .33 (Table 1) was obtained, which is significant ($p < .05$), but explained only 11 percent of the variance. This is consistent with the findings of Der-Karabetian

and Rico (1983) and suggests the possibility that experiences of intimacy gestures happen independently of the dominance experiences. Those who have more sexually intimate experiences do not necessarily experience more dominance gestures. Also, on average, about three times more (t = 29.56, $p < .001$) dominance gestures ($\bar{X}$ = 9.56, SD = 2.20) than intimacy gestures ($\bar{X}$ = 3.63, SD =2.67) are reported. One of the implications is the experiences of harassment as a condition of work may be unrelated to being otherwise socially dominated.

To identify factors that may or may not be related to experiences of sexual intimacy or dominance, scores on the two scales were correlated with age, length of employment, education and sex-role liberation (Table 1). None of the correlations were significant except between intimacy and education which was a weak positive one. There appears to be a slight tendency for more educated women to report more intimacy gestures, probably due to their heightened awareness. This was also found to be the case among federal employees (MSPB, 1981).

Sex-role liberation was slightly and negatively related to age and length of employment; but not to education, intimacy, and dominance scores. Religious affiliation, as Catholic versus mainline Prostestant, was also unrelated to intimacy and dominance.

To determine the interactive effects of marital status and age 2 X 2 (over 30 yrs. - under 30 yrs., and married - single) analyses of variance for unequal ns were conducted separately for the sexual intimacy and dominance scores as well as for the

sex-role liberation scores (Table 2). There were no significant interactions, age or marital status effects on intimacy and dominance gestures. On sex-role liberation, there was only age main effect (F (1,196) = 6.61, $p < .05$) where younger women scored more liberated, not surprisingly.

The results of this study support the contention that intimacy and dominance are separate dimensions and that harassment is not part of the working condition for women and it happens independent of age, marital status, education, length of employment, religious affiliation or sex-role liberation. Viewing the harassment of women as masculine domination is not an adequate explanation. Beyond sex-role socialization, social perceptual processes must be accounted for. Gutek, Morashch and Cohen (1983) and Cohen and Gutek (in press) have identified various dimensions of perceptions of social-sexual behavior in the work setting, only one of which specifically relates to sexual harassment. The others relate to the incident's personal qualities and the relationship between the two people and its future probability.

Another aspect of interpersonal perception that may help in the understanding of harassment is the differential evaluation of various social-sexual and professional relationships in terms of the degree of discomfort they cause. Determination of such perceptual discrepancies and awareness of them by men and women in the work place may help in the alleviation of the problem of harassment. Preliminary analysis of research presently in progress indicates

the existence of gross discrepancies in the perceptions of men and women concerning the subjective value of various personal and professional interactions in the work setting. In the long run, to adequately address the problem of harassment, it must be regarded as much of an interpersonal problem as a social or legal one.

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Table 1

Pearson Correlation Between Intimacy and Dominance Gestures and Sex-Role Liberation, Age, Length of Employment and Education

	Dominance	Sex-Role Liberation	Age	Length of Employment	Education
Intimacy	.33*	-.04	-.13	-.16	.26*
Dominance		-.01	-.07	-.07	-.01
Liberation			-.31*	-.26*	.02

* $p < .05$

Table 2

Means and Standard Deviations on Intimacy, Dominance and Sex-Role Liberation by Age and Marital Status

Age	Intimacy Gestures			Dominance Gestures			Sex-Role Liberation		
	Single	Married	Combined	Single	Married	Combined	Single	Married	Combined
Under 30									
$\bar{X}$	3.82	4.13	3.95	9.68	9.77	9.72	15.62	15.92	15.75
SD	3.09	3.16	3.12	2.04	2.18	2.08	3.29	3.09	3.20
Over 30									
$\bar{X}$	3.71	3.02	3.33	9.39	9.44	9.42	15.02	14.12	14.53
SD	2.67	1.49	2.15	2.25	2.30	2.27	3.01	3.43	3.29
Combined									
$\bar{X}$	3.77	3.47	3.63	9.55	9.57	9.56	15.35	14.85	15.11
SD	2.90	2.38	2.67	2.13	2.27	2.20	3.16	3.43	3.30